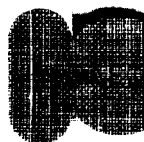


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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

November 21, 1975

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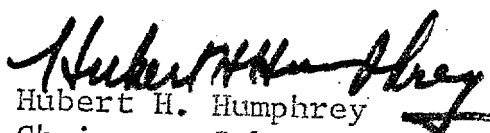
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The Honorable
William E. Colby
Director
Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, D.C. 20505

Dear Mr. Colby:

Enclosed is an article from the November 22, 1975, edition of the New Republic by Mr. Tad Szulc entitled "Upsetting the Balance in the Middle East". I would appreciate your providing me, for the use of the Subcommittee on Foreign Assistance, with a detailed point-by-point commentary, fully coordinated within the United States intelligence community, of all statements in this article involving the actions, plans or possible intentions of Foreign governments. I plan to address this request to Administration witnesses at a hearing of our Subcommittee today, but I want to ensure that the same request reaches you directly.

Sincerely,


Hubert H. Humphrey
Chairman, Subcommittee
on Foreign Assistance

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Arming Arab Upsetting the Balance In the Middle East

by Tad Szulc

Just two months after Egypt and Israel signed the interim Sinai agreement negotiated by Henry Kissinger, the United States and the Soviet Union have become involved in secret, previously unreported, military maneuvering in the Middle East that could in the end turn the strategic balance against Israel. Early in November the Russians secretly resumed limited arms shipments to Egypt, the first since Moscow turned off the spigot last May. The US, for its part, is bolstering Arab air forces, and justifying its actions as consistent with Secretary Kissinger's concept of "evenhandedness." As Russian, US and other weapons systems flow into Arab hands, promised shipments of US war materiel to Israel are running inexplicably behind schedule.

According to the Pentagon's intelligence experts, Soviet ships with military hardware began arriving in Alexandria and other Egyptian ports in the first days of this month. Described as "low profile," this flow is believed to consist of crates containing spare parts for airplanes and helicopters as well as for armored vehicles, artillery and trucks. Intelligence sources do not rule out, however, that the new shipments may also include crated planes and various types of ammunition.

These deliveries are reported to have coincided with the visit in the United States by Egyptian President Sadat, who sought, apparently unsuccessfully, support from President Ford to buy American arms. The Soviet shipments obviously were arranged prior to Sadat's visit, contradicting his claim that Egypt had decided it no longer wishes to be dependent on Russian arms.

After leaving Washington, Sadat tentatively contracted for the purchase of British and French equipment, notably the new Franco-British Jaguar strike jet fighter, but American military intelligence specialists doubt strongly that Egypt can switch in the foreseeable future from Soviet to Western weapons systems. They say that despite Sadat's recent denunciations of the Soviet Union, his armed forces cannot operate for very long without Russian equipment.

The intelligence community takes the view that Kissinger may have overestimated US capability to eliminate Soviet influence from the Middle East, including Egypt, despite his success in keeping the Russians out of his step-by-step diplomacy. Moscow, it is argued by intelligence experts, has too much of an investment in Egypt simply to bow out. What Sadat's visit to Washington strengthened US-Egyptian ties—

Cairo is to receive American economic aid and a nuclear reactor for power production—skeptics think that Sadat is hedging his bets. A high-level Soviet visit to Cairo may be in the offing to seek reconciliation.

Soviet deliveries to Egypt are dwarfed by the continuing shipments of sophisticated materiel to Syria. The Syrians have been so glutted that intelligence sources wonder if they have reached the saturation point. One conjecture is that some of it may be diverted to Egypt in an emergency. Syria, for example, has some 70 MiG-23 fighter-bombers—the most advanced Soviet warplane; Egypt has 30 of them. The MiG-23 can outperform the American-built Phantom, the mainstay of the Israeli air force, in certain conditions—particularly in high-altitude encounters—but it alone can't disturb the strategic balance.

The real danger is the bolstering of other Arab air forces which, in a conflict, could intervene to support both the Egyptians and the Syrians. This is what the US, prompted by the State Department, appears to be doing for the Arab air forces:

1) Last June, the Pentagon, pursuant to the law, informed Congress that \$119.5 million would be spent for "in-house" support and maintenance of F-5A jet fighters purchased in recent years by Saudi Arabia, and for pilot training. Pentagon sources suggest, however, that the actual amount is expected to be closer to \$300 million. Actually there are reasons to believe that in most cases Saudi Arabia would be allowed to buy the more advanced F-5E ("Tiger") version of this aircraft, replacing the original F-5As. Likewise—and, apparently, the Congress has not been so advised—these planes will be equipped with both the Maverick television-guided air-to-ground missile and the Rockeye laser-guided "smart" bomb. This would match Israeli air technology. In some instances the old F-5A would be retrofitted to carry the Maverick and the Rockeye. Saudi pilots are trained at home by Northrop Corporation teams and at air force bases in the US. The Israeli fear is that the modernized Freedom Fighters might be meshed with the Egyptian air force in the event of war.

2) The United States reportedly agreed last summer to let Saudi Arabia buy an undisclosed number of F-15 jet fighter-bombers. This is a new-generation aircraft, a possible replacement for the Phantom, and Israel, too, has been promised F-15s. Under the agreement, the first F-15s are to be delivered to Saudi Arabia in 1977. US Air Force teams are said to have visited Saudi Arabia recently to discuss the F-15 deal. The Saudis were given the option of purchasing the F-16 fighter, but they chose the F-15 because of earlier delivery dates. The F-16 would first be available in 1980. The Israeli view, according to American intelligence experts, is that modernized F-5s and the F-15s in Saudi hands could upset the strategic air balance in the Middle East within two years. This imbalance would be even greater if the US were to supply the MiG-23 to Egypt and Syria.

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November 22, 1975

3) Kuwait is to receive, over an eight-month period, 36 Skyhawk jet fighter-bombers along with Hawk anti-aircraft missile systems, similar to those being given Jordan. Israel has been flying Skyhawks for years and, intelligence experts say, its scientists have perfected electronic counter-measures (ECM) gear, weapons delivery systems and navigational computers on them. The Israeli concern is that Kuwait will benefit from these improvements on the Skyhawks since they have been incorporated into new models.

4) Despite formal denials by the State Department, intelligence officials insist that a limited number of Egyptian pilots are being trained in Iran on Phantoms purchased by the Tehran regime. If this is the case, a violation of US law could be involved, possibly forcing an automatic halt of Phantom deliveries to the Iranians. Under the Foreign Military Sales Act of 1973, countries obtaining US equipment may not make it available for use in any way by "third" countries without the consent of the President of the US as communicated to the Congress; the legislative history suggests that this ban would be applied to training practices as well. Such training of Egyptian pilots gives them access to American equipment outside US territory and may constitute the "first step" in the direct supply of high aerial technology to the Egyptians.

Informed sources say that the Pentagon opposed this use of Phantoms by Egyptians in Iran after the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) learned of it through its own channels. A high-level Pentagon protest to the State Department produced the response, "don't muddy the waters." It is assumed that this program, initiated early in September, is continuing.

It is impossible to determine whether these decisions to support Arab air forces had a direct link with the Sinai negotiations; some officials suspect that Kissinger used them as "bargaining chips" with the Egyptians. The State Department denies the Phantom program. Kissinger is not known to have alluded to these policies when he explained the Sinai agreement in executive sessions of congressional committees. He assured Congress that there were no secret US commitments behind the Sinai agreement.

Some officials suspect that the support given Arab air forces is part of a larger policy of continuing pressure on Israel in anticipation of further Kissinger step-by-step diplomacy in the Middle East. The reported resumption of Soviet arms shipments to Egypt serves, of course, to increase this pressure for additional concessions. As one official critical of State Department policies remarked recently, "in the end, Israel will be limited to total dependence on US aid or a nuclear option." Inasmuch as an Israeli resort to the nuclear option is considered extremely unlikely, the developing military situations in the Middle East seem to portend new pressures on Jerusalem for continued concessions to Egypt and for negotiations with Syria over relinquishing at least a part of the Golan Heights.